

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Big Sky RC Modelers Improvement Request
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2021, upon approval
Proponent:	Big Sky RC Modelers, Inc.
Location:	T22N R4E Section 33
Trust:	Capital Buildings
County:	Cascade County

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The DNRC Lessee, Big Sky RC Modelers, Inc., has submitted an improvement request on their special lease of state lands located in T22N-R3E-Section 33 (S1/2S1/2). Currently the infrastructure on this lease includes a graveled parking area, vault toilet, multiple sheds, lawn/greenspace area, tables and a runway. The lessee would like to increase the size of the graveled parking area, construct two new racetracks, and build a drivers' stand. They would also like to have areas reserved for overflow parking and temporary toilets. Those areas would be reserved for these uses only and mowed during times of use. The new improvements would take up approximately 1.5 acres. Please see attached maps.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

Patrick Rennie, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Archaeologist  
Montana Natural Heritage Program  
Montana Ground Water Information Center

#### 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

No other agencies are known to have jurisdiction and permits on this section.

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Alternative A:** No action alternative. The proposed project would not be approved.

**Alternative B:** Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to install improvements on State Land; increase parking lot size, construct two new racetracks and drivers' stand, allow space for temporary use of overflow parking and portable toilets.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

#### 4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.*

No fragile, compactable, or unstable soils are present. Soils on this site are Marias silty clay. Construction of the project would entail disturbing approximately 1.5 acres of land for the proposed improvements. The parking lot expansion would include vegetation removal and aggregate surfacing. The racetracks would include vegetation removal and dirt surfacing. The drivers stand would be constructed of wood materials on a gravel base. The racetrack

and drivers' stand areas would have the topsoil removed before construction and reserved in a berm for future reclamation. The proponent would also bring in additional material for construction of these items. The additional overflow parking and portable toilet sites would be mowed during use. Site disturbance would be small, but long term. There is little to no slope on this site, impacts to soils are anticipated to be minimal.

#### **5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:**

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.*

This State Land tract (T22N-R4E-Section 33 S1/2S1/2) has a portion of Black Horse Lake in S1/2SE1/4 of the section, which can be seen in aerial imagery maps at the end of this document. However, Black Horse Lake does not hold surface water year-round. Most of the year it appears to be a wetland with riparian type vegetation (sedges, rushes and cattails) visible throughout the lake area. Proposed improvements are approximately 0.5 miles away from the edges of Black Horse Lake. No other surface water is located on state owned lands on Section 33. According to Montana Ground Water Information Center website there are multiple wells documented in Section 33. Montana Department of Transportation drilled eight boreholes during 2015 and 2016 in SE1/4SE1/4 of the section. There are two privately owned wells located on deeded land in S1/2NE1/4. Proposed improvements are not anticipated to have impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.

#### **6. AIR QUALITY:**

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.*

Air Quality would be affected temporarily and short-term by this project during construction phases.

#### **7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:**

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.*

Cover, quantity, and quality of vegetative communities would be affected by this project; however, the area of disturbance is very small, approximately 1.5 acres. According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program website, the existing developments are classified as developed lands and the proposed improvements are classified as Great Plains Mixedgrass Prairie. Vegetation on the proposed development site is crested wheatgrass with a few invasive species including salsify, cheatgrass, prickly lettuce and dandelion. Vegetation would be removed for the proposed improvements. The proponent would be required to stockpile and save the topsoil for future reclamation.

#### **8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

The project would have minimal impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic wildlife species and their habitats due to the small size of the project. Construction practices used to construct and install the parking area, drivers' stand, and racetracks would be a one-time short duration occurrence to limit disturbance and would not lead to negative cumulative effects on terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats.

#### **9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

The Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located in the vicinity of the project area. The following species have habitat polygons in Section 33: grizzly bear, American bittern, burrowing owl, chestnut-collared longspur, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead strike, long-billed curlew, and Sprague's pipit. Polygons for these species are based on documented sightings, nests, and breeding and brooding areas along with known travel distances for each species. However, no point observations have been documented in Section 33. The proposed improvements are directly adjacent to similar existing infrastructure and use. The proposed project does not anticipate impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Because the area of potential effect was once cultivated, because the Holocene age soils in the APE are relatively thin, and because the local geology is not likely to produce caves, rock shelters, or sources of tool stone, no additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

A field inspection by Helena Unit Manager Heidi Crum was completed on May 17, 2021. No cultural resources were found in the vicinity of the proposed project.

**11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

The project is located in a rural part of Cascade County, approximately 6.5 miles northeast of Great Falls, MT off Highway 87. The state lands in this special lease are 160 acres of S1/2S1/2 of Section 33. The improvement site is located in the SW1/4SW1/4 of this section. The proposed improvements are small in acreage and are mostly ground surface and short structures. The use of portable toilets used by the lessee would impact aesthetics temporarily and short-term during events sponsored by the lessee. The proposed improvements are also directly adjacent other existing infrastructure and improvements. Alteration to aesthetics would be minimal with the proposed project.

**12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

No demands for additional environmental resources are required for this project. No cumulative effects to environmental resources should result from this project.

**13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

No other studies, plans, or projects were identified during the scoping for this project.

**IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

No health or safety risks are posed by the project.

**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

This tract of state land does not have an agriculture and grazing lease. No impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities are anticipated.

**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.*

The project will not create or eliminate permanent jobs in the area.

**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

No significant increase in tax revenues are expected as a result of this project.

**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.*

No increased demand for government services are expected as a result of this project.

**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

No locally adopted environmental plans will be affected by this project.

**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

This section is legally accessible to the public from Highway 87 and Black Horse Lake Road. This project would positively impact recreational activities in the area with more diverse events which could be sponsored by the lessee.

**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.*

No change in population will result from this project.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

No change in social structures and mores are expected as a result of this project.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

No change in cultural uniqueness and diversity of the area will result from this project.

**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

This special lease provides \$450 annually to the Capital Buildings trust. There is no grazing lease on this tract. This project would not impact the lease fees as the improvements are within the footprint of the lease acreage.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Heidi Crum	<b>Date:</b> 7-13-21
	<b>Title:</b> Helena Unit Manager	

## V. FINDING

### 25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

**Alternative B:** Action Alternative: Allow the proponent to install improvements on State Land; increase parking lot size, construct two new racetracks, allow space for temporary use of overflow parking and portable toilets.

### 26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This improvement request should have no significant, detrimental impacts or cumulative effects to the project area. The proposed project is small in size (approximately 1.5 acres) and adjacent to existing similar infrastructure on this lease.

### 27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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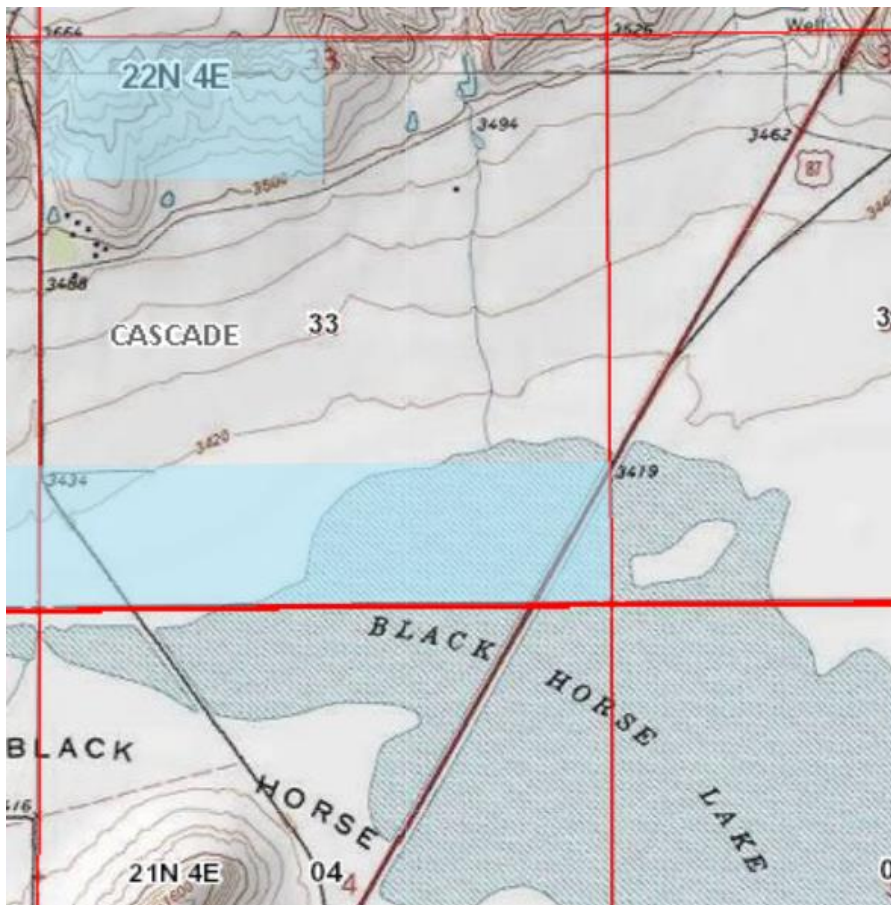
No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Andy Burgoyne
	<b>Title:</b> CLO Trust Land Manager
<b>Signature:</b> <div style="text-align: right;"><b>Date:</b> 7/16/21</div> 	

T22N-R4E-Section 33, aerial imagery. Blue areas depict State Trust Land ownership.



T22N-R4E-Section 33 and surrounding area on topographic map.



Zoom in of SW1/4SW1/4 of Section 33. Existing improvements can be seen in aerial imagery.





Improvement map with existing and proposed items submitted by proponent.

